



## Community Assistance

### Overview:

As the nation's demographics change, developed areas and individual homesites increasingly extend into wildland areas. These wildland/urban interface (WUI) areas exist wherever homes and businesses are built among trees, brush, and other flammable vegetation. WUI communities exist throughout the United States, in both rural and urban areas. Fires can move from brush or grasslands into communities or from communities into adjacent wildlands. Either way, community involvement is a critical element in reducing fire hazards near homes and communities and restoring damaged landscapes. Communities need many types of assistance and agencies provide support to meet these needs in educating citizens, community protection planning, training and equipping firefighters, purchasing equipment, and treating vegetation and landscapes around communities. Community assistance programs focus on building state and community capacity to develop and implement citizen-driven solutions that will lessen local vulnerability to risks associated with wildland fires.

### Community Assistance Budget Summary (\$ in thousands)

<b>National Fire Plan</b>	<b>FY 2001 USDA &amp; DOI</b>	<b>FY2002 USDA &amp; DOI</b>	<b>FY 2003 USDA &amp; DOI</b>	<b>FY 2004 USDA &amp; DOI</b>
Rural Fire Assistance	\$9,978	\$10,000	\$9,935	\$9,877
State Fire Assistance*	\$77,828	\$50,383	\$66,252	\$51,063
Volunteer Fire Assistance*	\$13,251	\$8,262	\$8,168	\$8,138
Economic Action Programs	\$12,472	\$12,472	\$4,967	\$0
Community & Private Land Fire Assistance	\$34,923	\$0	\$0	\$0

\* SFA and VFA funding includes National Fire Plan funding only. These programs receive funding from other budget line items not reflected in this table.

### Rural Fire Assistance (Department of the Interior)

In FY 2004, Department of the Interior funding provided wildland fire-related training, equipment, and public safety education support to 1,400 rural fire departments, thus enhancing firefighter safety and strengthening local wildland fire protection capacity and capability.

### State Fire Assistance (USDA Forest Service)

Forest Service funding in 2004 provided in excess of \$55 million for technical and financial assistance to states to enhance firefighting capacity at the state and local levels. This funding supported fire hazard mitigation projects in the WUI and facilitated an expanded series of Firewise workshops to help communities reduce the risks in fire-prone areas. State Fire Assistance provides key support to successful community programs such as Firewise Communities/USA and Fire Safe Councils. It will also support an

expanded national public service fire prevention program. Many Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) were also developed by communities and local fire departments in consultation with State Foresters to prioritize hazardous fuels treatments and reduce structural ignitability in communities with support from State Fire Assistance funding.

### **Volunteer Fire Assistance (USDA Forest Service)**

In FY 2004, the Forest Service provided funding, through the states, to 8,752 volunteer fire departments. This funding helped improve communication capabilities, increase wildland fire management training, and purchase protective fire clothing and firefighting equipment for fire departments that serve communities of less than 10,000 people. Rural volunteer fire departments provide major assistance to state forestry agencies in the suppression of wildland fires, and in some states rural fire departments suppress all such fires.

Volunteer fire departments also play a major role in critical initial attack response and suppressing wildfires on federal lands. The USDA Forest Service and various Department of Interior land management agencies have entered into cooperative agreements with many rural volunteer fire departments for the purpose of protection of both communities and natural resources.

### **The Firewise Communities Program**

The Firewise Communities Program – funded by the National Fire Protection Association, the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior, and other state, federal, and nonprofit partners – is a highly successful part of community hazard mitigation efforts. The program encourages communities and homeowners to take responsibility for hazard mitigation through land use planning, building codes, landscaping codes, zoning, and community fire protection planning. The year 2004 marked the fourth year of national-level workshops since the National Fire Plan was initiated. Approximately 2,500 people were reached through these workshops. Additionally, one-day spin-off workshops conducted around the United States amounted to about 60 one-day WUI/Firewise workshops representing about 40 communities and approximately 2,000 participants.

For FY 2004, the Forest Service made a commitment to work with each Region to focus on implementing and working with the Firewise program in the WUI areas. The ***Communities and Wildlands*** program was initiated to meet the goal of strengthening Forest Service understanding and commitment to Firewise principles and coordination with the national Firewise program through interaction with the National Fire Protection Alliance and Firewise stakeholders.

### **Community Wildfire Protection Plans**

In FY 2004, assistance was provided for hazard assessments, and funding was provided for Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) for communities at risk. CWPPs address issues such as wildfire response, hazard mitigation, community preparedness, and structure protection. They provide communities with a tremendous opportunity to influence where and how federal agencies implement fuel reduction plans on federal lands and how additional federal funds may be distributed for projects on nonfederal lands.

## **Economic Action Programs (USDA Forest Service)**

Although no designated National Fire Plan (NFP) funding was provided for Economic Action Programs (EAP) in FY2004, EAP coordinators did involve 990 rural communities and organizations in NFP-related projects. EAP assistance has enabled wildfire and hazardous fuels management issues to be included as components in more than 485 local strategic plans over the last four fiscal years. More than 190 such plans were done in FY 2004 despite the lack of NFP-EAP funding. Funds allocated across the nation addressed a full range of financial and technical assistance programs, including fuels reduction and utilization projects, bio-energy feasibility studies, wood utilization and product/market feasibility studies, modification or development of long-term fuels hazard reduction projects, and community economic development planning to expand or diversify the use of forest products.